

# A Hypochondriac Guide to Colon Cancer



Image: Unsplash

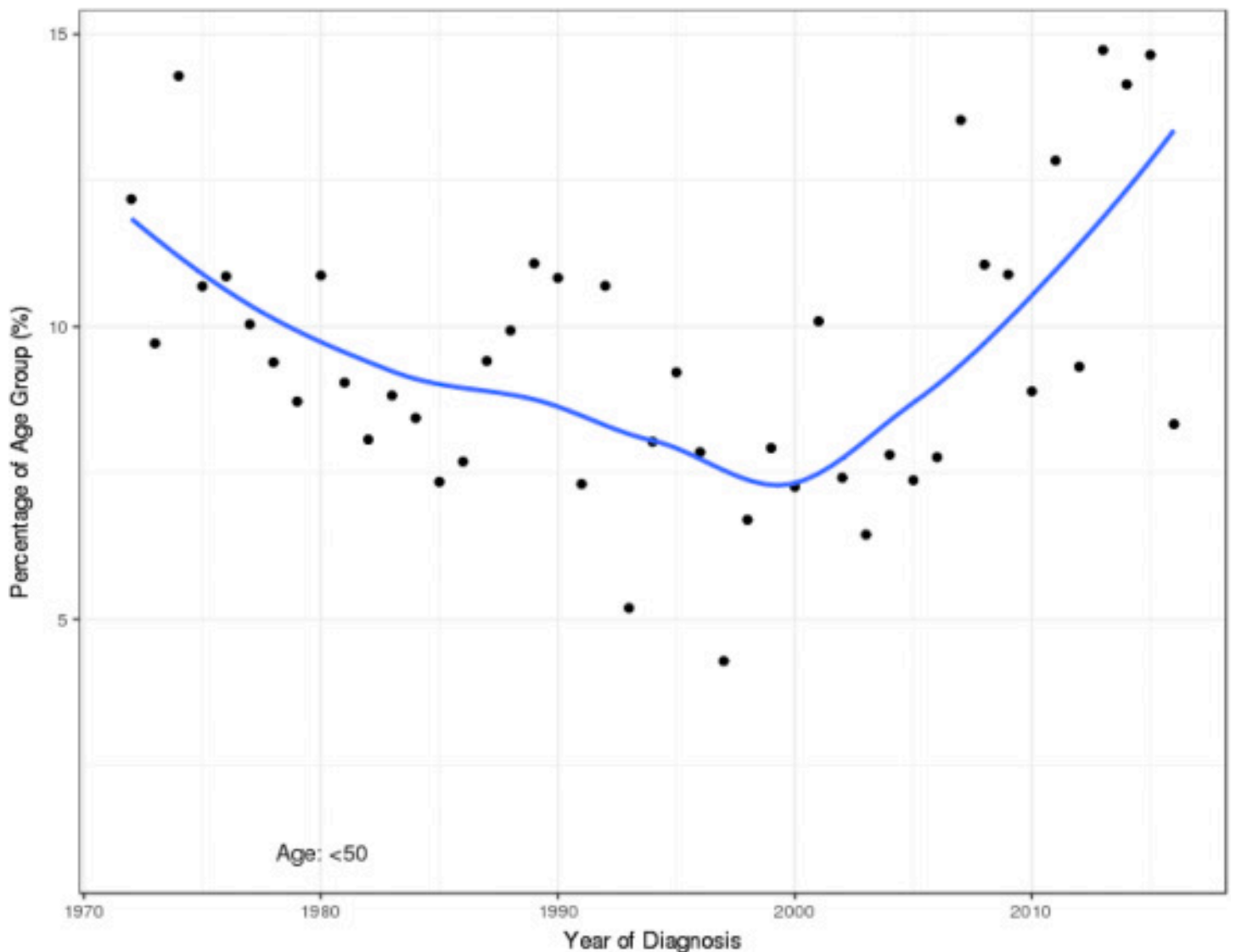
More young adults are getting diagnosed with colorectal cancers as incidence rates decrease in elderly populations - What can they do to prevent or catch it early?

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By Madison Antino

**April 2, 2024** – This past month I asked my parents if they could schedule me for my first colonoscopy. I haven't even turned 20 yet. Colon cancer does run in my family, but so does hypochondria, and after multiple videos on my TikTok For You Page stated an alarming rise of colon cancer is appearing in young adults, I got a stomach ache and immediately believed it to be cancer. Unfortunately, I'm not the only one, and my hypochondriac tendencies might save my life.

Over the last few decades, colorectal cancer has seen a strong uptick in cases among young adults. The fourth leading cause of cancer deaths for men and women in the late 1990s is now first for men and second for women, and incidence rates have increased by 1-2% annually for young adults under the age of 55, according to the [American Cancer Society](#). In a 2018 [study](#) released in the Clinical Colorectal Journal, oncologists and researchers from Jacksonville Mayo Clinic found an exponential rise in cases diagnosed in individuals under the age of 50 since the year 2000.



Proportion of Patients Diagnosed Before Age 50 - [Clinical Colorectal Journal](#)

Doctors and colorectal specialists still aren't sure the reasoning behind the uptick and are putting more of a focus on research, according to Emily Blasi of the Colorectal Cancer Alliance. The organization, a leading non-profit focused on ending colorectal cancer, has committed millions of dollars in funding this year for research to uncover the reasoning behind the increase in cases, but also finding better options for care and treatment.

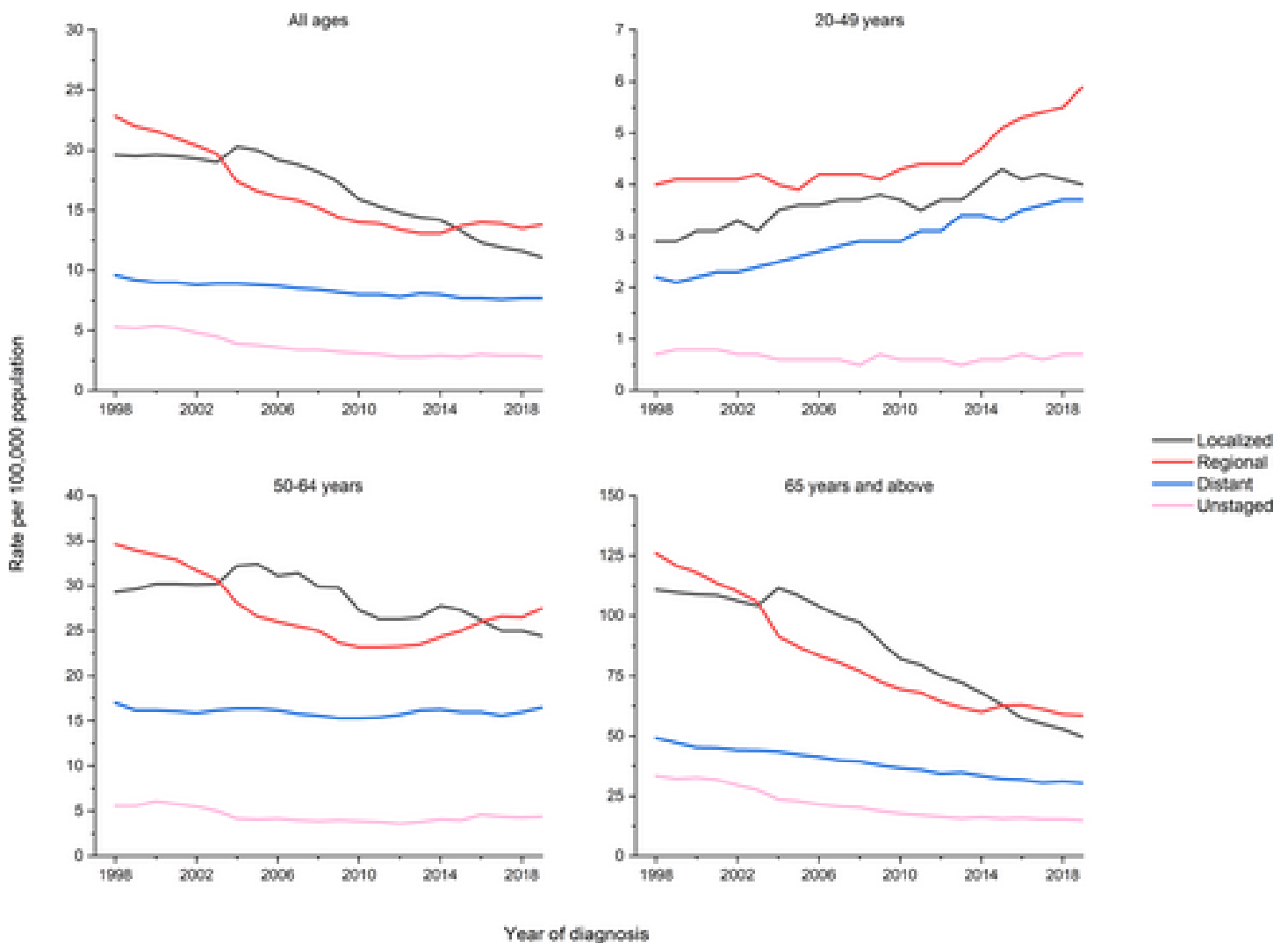
“Unfortunately we don’t have an answer yet,” she said. “But we’re hoping to learn more.”

Colorectal cancers can be more than 90% treatable when caught early, says Blasi. While paying attention to warning signs like major bowel changes and rectal bleeding, she explains that young adults should also keep in mind certain risk factors that could make them more susceptible. Family history is the most major sign of being at risk, but certain genetic syndromes like Lynch syndrome or chronic inflammatory bowel diseases such as Crohn’s and ulcerative colitis can also heighten one’s risk.

She assures that symptoms like abdominal discomfort and bowel changes can be very common, and it shouldn’t be a red flag until combined with rectal bleeding, rapid weight, fatigue and weakness.

“It’s definitely wise to listen to your body and know what the risk factors and symptoms are so that you can have a better conversation with your doctor,” she said.

Routine screening starting at the age of 50 has been linked to lowering incidence rates in the over 55 population, who are considered to be most at risk of being diagnosed. In 2021, the recommended colonoscopy age was lowered from 50 to 45, but the uptick in younger age groups has led to discussions of lowering the age again, while also promoting other less invasive forms of screening. Blasi states that the Colorectal Cancer Alliance offers easy to use screening tools on their [website](#), such as a personalized quiz with results based on your personal risk factors and symptoms on what options might be best.



Trends in the incidence of colorectal cancer by age and stage at diagnosis, 1998–2019 - [American Cancer Society Facts and Figures](#)

If you don't have any red flags or symptoms that warrant a screening, UC Davis oncologist Dr. Rashmi Verma suggests that any small changes to a healthier lifestyle are a step in the right direction to lowering your risk. Avoiding red meat, smoking, alcohol, being more active and consuming a balanced diet filled with fruits and vegetables and high in fiber have all been recommended by doctors to avoid colon cancer.

It's hard to find good news in rising cancer rates, but Dr. Verma explains that more cases are being diagnosed earlier due to better screening, and doctors are in fact seeing colorectal cancer cases being cured at higher rates and less mortality.